

Night Court for Child Support Calendar

Less Time Off Work, More Money for Support

Most parents in child support cases have to miss work in order to attend court hearings, and many—especially low-income earners—would then lose pay that might have gone to support their children. To spare those parents that loss of income, which was the last thing the courts wanted, [the Superior Court of Inyo County](#) started hearing child support cases at night. The court already had three Dedicated Child Support Calendars during working hours; it simply moved one of those calendars to after work hours. The court also allows telephone appearances on all calendars, when necessary.

The night calendar, held in the main population center of the county from 6 to 9 p.m., has the same staffing as the daytime calendars:

- The child support commissioner
- A court clerk
- A bailiff (from the sheriff's department)
- Attorneys, staff members, and an ombudsperson from [the Department of Child Support Services \(DCSS\)](#)
- The family law facilitator/family court services coordinator (one person)

Cascading Improvements

- When having to appear in court doesn't lead to people losing a day's pay, parties are more likely to appear.
- When parties appear and are heard, courts are likely to make more appropriate orders.
- When parents participate in child support court proceedings, they are much more likely to abide by court orders.

In most hearings on the calendar, parents who have been ordered to pay support are called into court to explain why they are not paying. The court process accomplishes several things:

- At the outset, the parents in a case meet outside the courtroom with the DCSS staff members, who gather information about whether the parent is working, actively seeking work, or unable to work. When it's appropriate, the parent may sign a stipulation to seek work and return on another date for the court to review the employment status. Since a court hearing that night is not necessary, the court calendar is expedited. DCSS staff may also save time by summarizing the information they gather from the parents so the commissioner can make appropriate orders in the case.
- The DCSS ombudsperson can discuss any issues not before the court, such as a parent's child support problems in other counties.
- The family law facilitator/family court services coordinator is available to discuss support-related issues such as child custody.

All these activities take place while the court is hearing other cases, and the initial meetings with DCSS staff enable the court to conduct more focused and efficient hearings. Parents benefit greatly from having access to support services that would generally be available only during the day.

Impacts

- In the first year, more than 300 people were served by the night court.
- More parents attended the child support calendar, allowing the court to resolve issues more quickly and completely.
- Parents no longer complained that they had to miss work (and lose pay) to attend court.
- The DCSS staff and family law facilitator/family court services coordinator had better access to clients and vice versa.
- The court calendar operated more efficiently.
- Costs (and staffing) for the night court were about the same as for the daytime calendars, and funds were obtained under the [Assembly Bill 1058 Child Support Commissioner and Family Law Facilitator Program](#).

Court Responsiveness Is Appreciated

Parties are grateful for the night court option. People see that the DCSS and the court are trying to respond to their needs. Now, instead of having to jump through endless hoops when they have family law questions that are not before the court, parents receive answers and help from the family law facilitator/family court services coordinator, the ombudsperson, or DCSS staff members in the meeting before the support hearing.

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